

The big focus in April was getting ready for Town Meeting.

Town Meeting Preparation

The Select Board makes recommendations to Town Meeting on all the warrant articles. Throughout April, we heard presentations on each one and voted our position. Going through article presentations helps to inform us and the public about the important actions Town Meeting will be asked to take. We deferred recommendations on articles related to the FY10 budget, as those specifics were still awaiting key State aid information. We voted to recommend almost all of the other articles, occasionally by a split vote, when one or two of us had concerns about some element or details. We also determined who would speak at Town Meeting about each recommendation; signed the warrant; and discussed the logistics of conducting Select Board business during the short meetings before Town Meeting sessions.

Budget

The budget is always a major topic, and is addressed in various ways at our meetings. This month, we received a presentation on the FY08 Audit Report, which was completed earlier this year. Such presentations are planned to occur annually going forward. The audit was "clean," and the report praised the Town's strong financial controls and accounting practices. Both the full audit, and the Audit Committee's report are available on the Town web site.

Another presentation was a budget update for the third quarter of FY09. This showed revenues and expenses to be tracking appropriately, with isolated areas of expenditure exceeding the budget (legal services, snow plowing, elections, and Police facility utilities;) and of revenue exceeding the budget (license and permit fees, and an unanticipated grant reimbursement.) It also indicated that close attention is being paid to areas like projected investment income and excise tax collection – revenues particularly impacted by the economic downturn. This report is also available on the web site.

Advocating for Financial Assistance and Investment

The Select Board has been active in sending letters to legislators in support of various initiatives to raise revenue, decrease costs or solicit funding for Amherst. This month, we sent letters requesting State funds for the Solar Lunchbox Project, which seeks to install solar panels on the roof of the High School cafeteria; and requesting Federal funds, through support of the Pioneer Valley Clean Energy Collaborative's block grant proposal, which seeks to reduce energy use and create "green" jobs locally.

Accepting Land Gifts

It was our pleasure to accept the generous donation of land to the Town from the Tietjen family. The land is in the Lawrence Swamp area off of South East Street and includes the donation of a 17-acre parcel for conservation purposes, and an easement allowing trail access over a 30-acre parcel which is being preserved for farming under the State's Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) program.

Making Information More Accessible

As follow-up to a letter we sent to boards and committees in February, Select Board members will be checking with each of the committees to which we are liaisons, to see if they are posting their agendas and minutes on the Town web site. Those that aren't will be strongly encouraged to do so, with the goal of increasing public awareness and participation.

New Chiefs Search

We elected two of our members to serve as Select Board representatives on the search committees for our next public safety chiefs. Aaron Hayden will assist with the Fire Chief search, and Gerry Weiss will assist with the Police Chief search.

Licenses, Permits and Fee Increases

In March, we approved a Common Victuallers License and All-Alcohol License for the new downtown restaurant, J's Cuisine. We approved two Taxi Drivers Licenses and seven one-day liquor licenses. The Select Board also took a tiny step to help raise revenue – by approving an increase in the fine for parking violations at bus stops, from \$50 to \$100, as allowed by a recently-amended State law.

Community Support: Public Way Requests and Proclamations

We approved requests to bag parking meters and/or to close streets for the following events: the 2009 Farmers Market, the 250th Celebration picnic, the Extravaganja festival, the Community Fair and the Cushman May Day celebration.

The Select Board offered its annual Arbor Day proclamation, and approved the flying of the Children's Memorial Flag on the Town Common in honor of National Child Abuse Prevention Month.

Housekeeping

After each Town election, we elect Select Board officers. Stephanie O'Keeffe was re-elected as Chair, Aaron Hayden was re-elected as Clerk, and the system of rotating the Vice Chair position monthly was maintained. We decided to end the recent experiment of having the Clerk take the meeting minutes, because it prevents full participation. Using staff assistance to create the minutes will be tried instead.

Town Manager Information

The Town Manager provided a progress report on the performance goals established by the Select Board. He also informed us about the creation of new procedures to coordinate assistance to people facing eviction; discussions with Cooley Dickinson Hospital about creating an urgent care facility in Amherst; the potential loss of the local Amtrak stop and efforts to prevent that; and the decision by Amherst College to find a development partner for the Lord Jeff project. Updates were provided on ongoing issues including the procedure for distributing funds from a legal settlement to be used for emergency shelter and fuel assistance; police response to rowdy students in neighborhoods and at Puffer's Pond; parking enforcement for downtown meter-feeding; meetings with employees regarding the budget situation; and discussions with Town unions about cost of living increases. He also reported on the official and community events he attended.

Hearing from the Public

Members of the public expressed concern to the Select Board on issues including efforts to address and prevent homelessness in town, and about the importance of maintaining local rail service.